

Upagupta, the Fourth Buddhist Patriarch, and High Priest of Aṣōka.—
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The name of Upagupta occurs incidentally in the scriptures and commentaries of the so-called Northern or Mahāyāna Buddhists, as the patronymic of the fourth member of the series of patriarchs of the Buddhist Church, in direct succession from the epoch of Ṣākya Muni's death.¹ He is also referred to therein, as being the converter and spiritual adviser of the great emperor Aṣōka;² and it is in this respect, as the alleged inspirer of Aṣōka's great missionary movement, which led to Buddhism becoming a power in the world, that Upagupta claims our special notice. Of such importance is he considered, that his coming is alleged to have been predicted by both Buddha himself³ and by his favourite disciple Ānanda.⁴ And of him Tāranātha, the Tibetan historian, writes: 'since the death of the Guide (Buddha) no man has been born who has done so much good to living beings as this man.'⁵

In the scanty references to Upagupta by European writers it is generally stated that "he is not known to the Southern school of Buddhism."⁶ This statement, however, is probably not strictly true. For, I find that a great Buddhist *arahat* of the same name, and apparently this identical person, is well known to the Burmese. The circumstances, however, under which he is known to them are peculiar. Although he is one of the most popular of the Buddhist Saints in Burma, and a special festival is held in his honor every year, as will

¹ Rockhill's *Life of the Buddha*, and the early history of his Order, 170; and the Chinese lists by Edkins, *Chinese Buddhism*, pp. 6-7, etc.; Lassen's *Ind. Alterth.* II, 1201; also Beal and Eitel and my *Buddhism of Tibet*, p. 8.

² Beal's *Si-yu-ki*, II, 88. Burnouf's *Introduction du Bouddhisme Indien*, pp. 118, 197, 336, 378.

³ Burnouf's *Intro.*, 336. Tāranātha's *Hist. of Indian Buddhism*, fol. 12.

⁴ Rockhill's *Life, &c.*, 164.

⁵ Beal's *Si-yu-ki*, I, 182, n. 48.

⁶ Tāranātha's *op. cit.*, fol. 12.

presently be described, and his name is familiar to all the monks as well as the laity; still the former could not point out to me any reference to him in their scriptures, either ancient or modern. The fact seems to be that Upagupta is not now an orthodox character in Burma, and his traditional worship or veneration is probably a survival of the Mahāyāna form of Buddhism, which prevailed in mediæval times in both Burma and Ceylon. But why he should be regarded as unorthodox by the puritan modern Sthaviras or the so-called Southern Buddhists, is remarkable, seeing that Upagupta was himself a Sthavira and the leader of the Sthavira sect of primitive Buddhists, who followed the simple ethics of the original *Vinaya* code. Perhaps it may have been owing to his having been credited with disreputable magic powers, while he had not like his great wizard prototype, Māudgalyāyana, ('Mogalli') the saving fortune of being a personal follower of the Buddha.

In this connection it is noteworthy that Upagupta holds in most of the Northern chronicles, the identical position in regard to Aṣōka which the relatively vague and less trustworthy Ceylonese traditions ascribe to 'Mogalliputta Tissa' (Maudgalyiputra Tiṣya), a name which is unknown to the Northern authorities. So it is perhaps worth considering whether this latter name may not be merely a title of Upagupta, and formed possibly by fusing the names of the two chief disciples of the Buddha, Maudgalyī-putra,¹ and Upatiṣya (or Ḍāriputra), to bring him, as the great patron monk of Ceylon, as near as possible to Ḍākya Muni himself.

However this may be, as Upagupta seems a personage of considerable historical importance, I propose here to string together the notices of his life which I have gleaned from various sources.

Legendary versions of his life are to be found in the Tibetan in the 3rd and 4th chapters of Tāranātha's *History of Buddhism in India*;² and in the 47th chapter of the Mongolian *Dsay-Blun*.³ Tāranātha, a Tibetan who never visited India and who wrote less than three centuries ago, makes Upagupta precede Aṣōka by about one generation, but the much more trustworthy Chinese traveller Hiuen Tsiang in common with the Nepalese accounts⁴ state that Upagupta was the chief monk and adviser of Aṣōka at Pāṭaliputra. In the

¹ He is often so-called, *e.g.*, Beal's *Si-yu-ki*, I, 39, 40, 59, 61, 108, 180, 183, 187, 235; II, 6, 7, 9, 175 *et seq.* Also in colloquial Tibetan where his name is shortened into 'Mongal-pu and Mohugal-pu'; while Ḍāriputra is called 'Shāri-pu.' Conf. also Csoma's *Analysis of the Kah-gyur*, &c., in Vol. XX. of *Asiatic Researches*, pp. 49, 52.

² Translated into German by Schiefner.

³ Translated into German by I. Schmidt as 'Der Weise und der Thor.'

⁴ See preceding footnote No. 2.

following biographical account the details where not otherwise stated are taken from the original Tibetan text of Tāranātha.

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Upagupta is said to have been the son of one Gupta, a perfume-seller¹ of Benares,² (or 'Chali'³ or Mathurā;⁴) and he entered the Buddhist order at the age of seventeen,⁵ "one hundred years after the Nirvāṇa of the Blessed one (Çākya Muni)."⁶ This date is given according to the same generally consistent chronology of the Northern Buddhists which also places the great Açōka at one hundred years after the Nirvāṇa,⁷ and which knows of no second Açōka or the Kālāçōka of Ceylonese tradition.

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He was converted by the *arahat* Yaças or Yasheka, who seems to be the same as the president of the council of Vaiçālī, which as both northern and southern accounts agree was held one hundred and ten years after the Nirvāṇa.

Three years after entering the order, he attained Arahatship, of an exceptionally high order, becoming 'a Buddha without the marks,' (Alakṣaṇakō Buddhaḥ);⁸ and he converted many to the faith.

He succeeding to the patriarchate of the Buddhist Church on the death of Çāṇavāsika, the third patriarch, in Campā (Bhagalpur) "he crossed the sunken Ganges (or 'the Bargal river') to Vidēha (Bettiah) in western Tīrahuti (Tirhut) and went to the monastery erected by the householder Vasusāra." After a short stay there he proceeded to Mt. Gandha⁹ where he made many converts. Thence he went to "Mathurā in the north-west of the Middle Country" and resided at the monastery on the top of Mount 'Shira' (Çira or Uçira or Urumuṇḍa¹⁰ or Muruṇḍha¹¹) founded during the time of the patriarch Çāṇavāsika, by the two chief merchants of the place Naṭa and Bhaṭṭa.¹² While here, he converted crowds of people who had been beguiled

1 Rockhill's *Life, &c.*, p. 164. Burnouf's *Intro.*, p. 336. Schiefner, his translation of Tāranātha has omitted the word *Gupta* which occurs in the Tibetan text.

2 *Der Weise und der Thor.*, 47 chap.

3 So a Chinese gentleman reads for me the Chinese word in Eitel's *Dictionary*, p. 187, and which Mr. Eitel renders 'Pāṭaliputra.'

4 Burnouf's *Intro.*, 336.

5 Beal's *Si-yu-ki*, I, p. 182 n.

6 Rockhill's *Life, &c.*, p. 164. Baniyo Nanjio's *History of Japanese Buddhist Sects*, 24.

7 Beal's *Si-yu-ki*, II, 85, and Burnouf's *Intro.*, 330.

8 Cf. also Burnouf's *Intro.*, 337 and n. 1: Rockhill's *Life, &c.*, 164.

9 Or Gandhara, or Gandamādana.

10 Conf. also Burnouf's *Intro.*, 337.

11 Rockhill's *Life, &c.*, 164.

12 Conf. also Rockhill and Burnouf as above.

by Māra in the shape of a dancer with attendants male and female. Upagupta overcomes these by magical means bestowing on them garlands which he turns into clinging corpses, from which he sets them free only on condition that they cease their wicked ways. In this regard it is curious to find that dancing girls are the subject of some very fine sculptures which were found at an ancient Buddhist site at Mathurā.¹ A slightly different and more dramatic version of this personal contest with Māra is given by Aṣvaghōṣa as an *Avadāna*.² According to this version “Māra found Upagupta lost in meditation and placed a wreath of flowers on his head. On returning to consciousness and finding himself thus crowned, he entered again into *Samādhi* to see who had done the deed. Finding it was Māra, he caused a dead body to fasten itself round Māra’s neck. No power in heaven or earth could disentangle it. Finally Māra returned to Upagupta, confessed his fault and prayed him to free him from the corpse. Upagupta consented on the condition that he (Māra) would exhibit himself under the form of Buddha ‘with all his marks.’ Māra does so and Upagupta overpowered by the magnificence of the supposed Buddha falls down before him in worship. The tableau then closes amid a terrific storm.”

At Mathurā, both Hiuen Tsiang and Tāranātha mention a large cave into which Upagupta was in the habit of throwing a chip of wood to register the number of individuals who attained Arahatship through him, until the cave ultimately became filled with the chips.

From Mathurā he proceeded to Aparānta³ (Sindh), during the reign of a king called Mahendra and his son ‘Chamasha,’ and there the inhabitants of Bagal erected for him a retreat in ‘the grove of the duck-herd,’ which was called ‘the *Saṅghārāma* of the Duck’—this certainly does not seem to be the *Kukkuṭārāma* or monastery of the Cock, as Schiefner translates.⁴ Hiuen Tsiang also states that “Upagupta the great *Arahat* frequently sojourned in this kingdom (Sindh),”⁵ a country which, he notes, was famous for its salt. And as

¹ *Archaeol. Survey of India Repts.* Vol. XVII, Plate XXXI. The sculptures represent dancing girls dancing on dwarfs, which have been supposed to symbolize Energy acting on Matter.

² Beal’s *Fo-sho-hing-tsano-king*, p. XII (Sacred Bks. of East), and in *Si-yu-ki*, I, p. 182

³ Tāranātha *op. cit.*

⁴ This place was in Aparānta in the extreme west of India, while the *Kukkuṭārāma* was in Pāṭaliputra. Conf. Schiefner’s translation of Tāranātha’s History, p. 18. The Tibetan word is ‘bya-gag’ which according to Jaeschke’s *Dictionary* is the name of a species of water-bird or duck. And my MS. Tibeto-Sanskrit Dictionary gives the Sanskrit equivalent as *Bakah*, and the feminine as *Nākuli*.

⁵ Beal’s *Si-yu-ki*, II, 273.

the word Sindh means in Sanskrit 'Sea-salt' it is possible that the Burmese legend which makes Upagupta reside in the salt sea, may have its origin in a too literal translation of this word. Hiuen Tsiang records that "the places where he (Upagupta) stopped (in his explaining the Law and convincing and guiding men) and the traces he left are all commemorated by the building of *Saṅghārāmas* or the erection of *stūpas*. These buildings are seen everywhere."¹

He visited 'Kha-chhe' (Kashmir), in a miraculous manner, says a Tibetan account,² and there he erected "the long stone." This seems a reference to his planting of an Aṣōka-pillar. During his three months stay in that country, he preached the law, worked many miracles, and amid lightning and earthquakes he descended to the watery palace of the Nāga dragon-king of the lake of Kha-chhe, and afterwards "disappeared into the sky."

At Pāṭaliputra, his hermitage was, as in Mathurā, on a hill which is described by Hiuen Tsiang as "a little mountain. In the crags and surrounding valleys there are several tens of stone dwellings which Aṣōka Rāja made for Upagupta and other *arahats* by the intervention of the genii."³ The ruins of this artificial hill now form the *Chōtī Pahārī* or 'small hill' to the south of Patna, as was identified by me some years ago;⁴ and this identification has been confirmed by the excavation of the ruined tower by its side, as described by the great Chinese pilgrim. Aṣōka's conversion to Buddhism according to the Chinese account was effected by Upagupta, who also, it is stated, advised the erection of monasteries and stūpas all over India. Amongst the first of these monasteries was the *Kukkuṭārāma* or 'Garden of the Cock,' erected to the south-east of the city and capable of holding a thousand monks.⁵ This building was the scene of the dialogues reported in the *Divyāvadāna*, in the *Mahāyāna Sūtra* entitled the *Guṇa Karaṇḍa Vyūha*, purporting to have been held between Aṣōka and Upagupta, and translated in part by Burnouf.⁶ A Tibetan version also is said to exist.

Upagupta's first visit to Aṣōka, is made in the Indian *Divyāvadāna* to come some time after Aṣōka's conversion, and his erection of relic-stūpas. But it is Upagupta who is associated with Aṣōka in the latter's pilgrimages to the sacred Buddhist spots, and his marking of them by the

¹ *Idem*.

² A MS. extract from the Tibetan translation of the *Kālacakra* (Tib. 'Dus-'khor.)

³ Beal's *Si-yu-ki*, II,

⁴ Preliminary Report on the Ruins of Pāṭaliputra. Calcutta, 1892, p. 15.

⁵ Beal's *Si-yu-ki*, II, 88.

⁶ Burnouf's *Intro.*, pp. 338, *et seq.*

magnificent monuments which later tradition ascribes to the agency of the genii. Interesting details are also given of the manner in which Aṣōka made these pilgrimages. It is related,¹ how Aṣōka at the instance of Yaças, the elder, invites Upagupta who was at Mathurā to come to his assistance at Pāṭaliputra, and the king provides the boats for this long river journey. On his arrival, Aṣōka receives him with the highest honours and exclaims: "You who resemble the Master! You who are the sole eye of the universe, and the chief interpreter (of the Law) be my refuge Sir, and give me your commands! I shall eagerly hasten, accomplished sage, to obey thy voice!" The sage replied 'O great king, Bhagavat, the Venerable Tathāgata, the perfect and complete Buddha has entrusted to me as well as to *you* the depository of the Law. Let us make every effort to preserve that which the Guide of beings has transmitted to us, when he was in the midst of his disciples.'

* * * *. Then (the king) falling at the feet of the Sthavira Upagupta cried out, 'This O Sthavira, is my wish: I wish to *visit, honour, and mark by a sign for the benefit of remote posterity all the spots* where the Blessed Buddha has sojourned.' 'Very good, O great king,' replied the Sthavira, 'this thought of thine is good. I will go this day to show you the spots where the blessed Buddha sojourned'²

* * * * *. "Then the king equipped with an army of the four bodies of troops, took perfumes, flowers and garlands, and set out in the company of the Sthavira Upagupta. The latter began by conducting the king to the garden of Lumbinī. Then extending his right hand he said to him: '*Here O great king, was the Bhagavat born.*' And he added 'Here (at this site), excellent to see, should be the first monument consecrated in honour of the Buddha' * * * * *. The king after giving a hundred thousand (golden coins) to the people of the country raised a stūpa and retired."³

Now it is remarkable that the words here used are almost the identical words which Aṣōka himself uttered at this place, as inscribed on his edict-pillar which has just been found by Dr. Führer in the place which was first indicated by me,⁴ and by me also were made the arrangements for the recovery of this lost site. This inscription on the Aṣōka-edict-pillar at the actual birth-place of the Buddha is translated by Dr. Bühler in the *Times* of the 25th ultimo (January), as recording

¹ Burnouf's *Intro.*, p. 337.

² Burnouf's *Intro.*, p. 340.

³ *Idem.*, p. 342.

⁴ See my article sent to this Society on the 11th May, 1896, entitled a *Tibetan Guide-book to the site of Buddha's birth and death*, and afterwards published in more detail in the *Englishman* of 1st June, 1896.

that “king Piyadasi (Açōka), twenty years after his accession (literally ‘anointing’) himself came to this very spot and there worshipped saying ‘Here was the Buddha, the Çākya ascetic born,’ and that he erected this stone pillar which records that ‘Here the Venerable One was born.’”

Thus it would almost appear as if Açōka had merely repeated the words put into his mouth by Upagupta. However this may be, this remarkable coincidence seems to strengthen materially the historical value of this part of the somewhat legendary *Divyāvadāna*, which in spite of the internal evidence of its having been composed much later than the epoch of Açōka, still Burnouf had already considered it to be semi-historical.¹

This Açōka-legend goes on to relate how Upagupta conducted the king to most of the chief sites hallowed by Buddha and his chief disciples. Amongst these latter, especial prominence is given to Maudgalyāyana with whom as has been mentioned Upagupta seems possibly to have had his name associated. Certainly the following reference to Maudgalyāyana invests him with much the same attributes as those ascribed to Upagupta at Mathurā and Kashmir; and these are also mentioned by Hiuen Tsiang² and others.³ The *Avadāna* says:—

“The Sthavira Upagupta showing afterwards the stūpa of the Sthavira Mahā Maudgalyāyana thus spoke, ‘Here, O great king, is the stūpa of (the remains of) the great Maudgalyāyana; you ought to honour it.’ ‘What are the merits of this sage,’ queried the king. The Sthavira replied ‘He has been designated by Bhagaṇat as the chief of those who possessed supernatural power, because with the great toe of his right foot he shook Vaijayanta, the palace of Çakra, the Indra of the gods. He converted the two Nāga kings Nanda and Upananda.’ And he uttered this verse: ‘It is necessary to honour, all that one can, Kōlita (*i.e.*, Maudgalyāyana) the foremost of Brāhmins, * * * *. Who in this world could surpass the ocean of power of this sage in the perfect Intelligence—he who has conquered the serpents, those famous beings, so difficult to subdue?’ The king having given a hundred thousand (golden pieces) for the stūpa of the great Maudgalyāyana⁴ exclaimed with hands joined in respect, ‘I honour with bended head the celebrated Maudgalyāyana, the foremost of sages, gifted with supernatural power, who has freed himself from birth, old age, sorrow and pain.’”⁵

¹ Burnouf's *Intro.*, 378 n.

² Beal's *Si-yu-ki*, II, 176.

³ Conf. my *Buddhism of Tibet*, pp. 98-99.

⁴ This Açōka Stūpa was visited by Hiuen Tsiang (Beal's *Si-yu-ki*, II, 175.)

⁵ Burnouf's *Intro.*, p. 348.

Nāgā
Nanda

As to Upagupta's death, accounts differ. Some state that he died¹ and that this event occurred at Mathurā;² but I find no reference to his relic-stūpas. The Japanese legend relates,³ that "there was an earthquake and he transcended (or crossed over;)" or it may read, "he went to 'Shin-tam.'" The Burmese tradition seems to make him yet alive like Mahākasyapa and a few other *Arahats* by getting outside the circle of re-births. His personal entity or *Sattva* while it still retained a body has by mystical means become liberated from the influence of Avidyā and the operation of the Causal Nexus, and in this way by his supernatural power or *Rddhi*, he has secured immortality.⁴

The residence in the sea, allotted to this immortalized Upagupta, as a sort of king of the Nāga or dragon-spirits, could be explained by his reputation for supernatural power and his special association with Sindh or 'sea-salt,' his coming to Açōka by boat, and the connexion of his name with the conquest of Nāga-kings.⁵ And Açōka himself is also credited with having become reborn as a Nāga. A slightly different and more humorous version of the legend of the popular Burmese saint, is given by Mr. Scott in his charming book on the Burmese. He relates⁶ that 'Oopagoh' is condemned to existence as a water-god through having in his previous existence "carried off the clothes of a bather, and for this mischievous pleasantry is condemned to remain in his present quarters till Areemadehya (Maitreya) the next Buddha shall come. Then he will be set free and entering the Thenga (*Sangha*) will become a Rahan and attain Neh'ban (Nirvāṇa). He is a favourite subject for pictures, which represent him sitting under his brazen roof or on the stump of a tree, eating out of an alms-bowl which he carries in his arms. Sometimes he is depicted gazing sideways up to the skies, where he seeks a place that is not polluted by corpses."⁷ This version, however, does not indicate why 'Oopagoh' should be worshipped with such zeal by Burmese Buddhists; while the version given me by a learned Burman, as above noted, relates that the hero is a great *Arahat* who by his magical power has secured long life or immortality, and can confer luck.

The Burmese festival in honour of this 'Upagu,' resembles some-

¹ Eitel's *Dict.*, p. 187.

² Tāranātha, fol. 11.

³ *Butsu dso dsui*, p. 151.

⁴ Conf. my *Buddhism of Tibet*, p. 120.

⁵ Burnouf's *Intro.*, p. 336. And his doings at Kashmir as above related.

⁶ *The Burman, his Life and Notions*, by Sway Yoe, I, 272.

⁷ This reference to corpses may be compared with the Mathurā incidents in his biography.

what the feast in honour of the great Indian Nāga king, Mahākāla, the 'Dai Koko' of the Japanese Buddhists who also celebrated this festival in a somewhat similar manner, a leading feature of which is the treasure-boat of the Nāga dragon-spirits.¹

It is held on the last day of the Buddhist Lent or Varṣa (Wās), at the end of the rainy season, about October. All the houses are ablaze with lamps and nearly every Burman builds a tiny boat, decorates it with flowers, illuminates it and then launches it on the river, with music, and the prayer that it may be carried on to 'Upagu,' and bring back to them the luck-giving saint—a procedure which recalls the incident of Aṣōka sending boats to bring Upagūpta, the saintly interpreter of the Law, which confers religious fortune. The effect of this miniature flotilla is often very fine. A thousand tiny specks of light dancing on the dark bosom of the waters. During the night all eagerly expect to have the good fortune of a visit from the 'Upagu' somewhat like the visit of Santa Claus (St. Nicholas) on Christmas eve; for those who are thus favoured are endowed with long life and good luck. On such occasions many clandestinely sprinkle water on their door steps for good luck in pretence that the water-god has paid them a visit. Such seems to be the popular hero-worship in Burma, now-a-days, accorded to the great High Priest of Aṣōka.

¹ W. Anderson's *Catalogue of Chinese and Japanese paintings in the British Museum*, p. 38.
